

6 Catholic

Small police station. A calendar shows grain elevators. Maureen, about nineteen, types with two fingers. She wears old ski pants and baggy sweater. But even in the dim light, her red hair, white skin and green eyes startle. She stays absorbed as Sheriff enters, wizeny-skinny. He sheds huge checkered mackinaw, shakes snow out, hangs it on chair.

MAUREEN Damn! Now the e keeps sticking all the time.

SHERIFF What we got?

MAUREEN (nodding to inside room) Him.

SHERIFF I can see it's a him. And what's that tousley hat over his...over him?

MAUREEN Mine. My ski cap. Like it?

SHERIFF Now look here! You shouldn't be handling any of this sort of business, young lady. You're just an intern.

MAUREEN What do you mean by handling?

SHERIFF Now let's just not get into any of this silly foolishness of yours. I got a daughter your age for gosh sakes. You just don't be fresh is all!

MAUREEN We had things like this in Criminal Science 1.

SHERIFF That's in a book.

MAUREEN Rape and all that good stuff.

SHERIFF You stop right there!

MAUREEN How to prove penetration.

SHERIFF Oh my God!

MAUREEN Objective science, Sheriff! (A groan from the other room which they ignore)

SHERIFF I don't want to hear about it. Nothing. Especially from you.

MAUREEN Just trying to have a discussion of the case.

SHERIFF Don't give me any of that stuff they give you over at the college. It's bad enough the scum I got to deal with sometimes without talking it over with a nineteen year old girl. Now, just what's wrong with him? Let's get at that one first.

MAUREEN Terminal shame.

SHERIFF This here is a police department, missy. You don't mind I remind you?

MAUREEN Check.

SHERIFF You determine if he needed medical treatment?

MAUREEN Mother and I examined the exposed part. There are no white spots which would determine frostbite.

SHERIFF Good. What? I mean...Mother? Your mother?

MAUREEN She was a nurse with logging camps. Seen it all. This was nothing.

SHERIFF I don't mean that. I mean here? Your mother here? What in blue blazes...?

MAUREEN. When I couldn't raise you on the radio I thought I'd better get out to the lake myself so I asked ole Mom to come in here and answer calls. There weren't any.

SHERIFF I was bottom of South Johnson Creek Road with six, count em, six fender benders when some damn eighty year old Swedish farmer made it lucky seven with me. I pulled his damn license then and there and I'm not worried a judge'll back me up on it. Anyways, guess he banged up my radio too.

MAUREEN I called. I did call.

SHERIFF Yeah and you're supposed to call down to Deer Creek for help, not your mother. Where's that damn guidebook for you interns. You show me where it's written down you call mothers.

Maureen Sheriff! They were completely tied up at Deer Creek then. I did get through later though. Anyway, everything was all right. Mother knitted. Madame Defarge.

SHERIFF One woman at a time if you don't mind.

MAUREEN Do I qualify?

SHERIFF Great way to run a police department! Suppose the mayor dropped in to see...what? Lady in a quilted housecoat I do suspect.

MAUREEN Great deduction! Hey!

SHERIFF Since that's the way she'd probably run over here after your hysterical phone call that you had to go out and make your first arrest! Or whatever.

MAUREEN I didn't arrest him. Didn't know I could. I mean, just being an intern.

SHERIFF Course you can't. Only I'm empowered around here. Me! Get it? What if he resisted?

MAUREEN I hear. I hear.

SHERIFF You don't never hear. That's what I'm gonna write up on you.

MAUREEN There goes my grade point average.

SHERIFF There it done went you mean. Went! Now what we got? You do a report?

MAUREEN (pulling sheet from typewriter) Well, not my mother but

Mrs. Adinolfi.

SHERIFF That much I know already, that she's the complainant.

MAUREEN I copied it hot, just like she said it, and then typed it up.

SHERIFF Yeah well we're all out of medals this week. Leave me look.

MAUREEN Uhm, could I read it to you? I'm not sure about all the spellings.

SHERIFF She can't spell neither!

MAUREEN I'll type it again! And on my own time!

SHERIFF Let's hear it then. But without the usual academy award performance.

MAUREEN Okay then. Low-key chalky lighting. Music from the minuet; camera shows a cold, a forbidden lake.

SHERIFF I'm warning you Missy!

MAUREEN (reading) Mrs Pasquale Adinolfi, the former Dr. Lucy-Adele Falcone...

SHERIFF We don't care about that. What you put all that down for?

MAUREEN She insisted. Wanted me to know she had taught at the college before that genuine Italian bought half the big lake and married her.

SHERIFF Society page!

MAUREEN (jabbing an elbow into him) And since he died she's one smoldering widow.

SHERIFF Just the facts ma'am. And watch them there flying elbows if you don't mind.

MAUREEN She got a little frosted tonight, though.

SHERIFF You reading?

MAUREEN Yes. No. My error. Right. I'm quoting now.

SHERIFF Marvelous. This report's about an F right this minute.

MAUREEN "I was preparing to retire when I heard a commotion on the lake. I thereupon switched on the floodlights and saw two men approaching my residence over the quite-slick surface of the ice."

SHERIFF It's a short story. Like O'Henry or somebody.

MAUREEN "Uh, one gurgling, horribly and the other...exposed, his, uh, penis enormously engorged."

SHERIFF (lightly tapping while staring at his dripping mackinaw)
What she teach at the college?

MAUREEN Romantic Literature.

SHERIFF (continues staring, tapping) All right, we got a dickie waver. We had plenty before but not at ten below.

MAUREEN Shall I...?

SHERIFF Enormously engorged! Jesus H. Christ! Excuse me.

MAUREEN The...dickie waver was "screaming over and over, 'You're gonna...'"

SHERIFF Don't YOU say it!

MAUREEN Sorry. Penis flaunter? Anyway--and now I am definitely quoting 'You're gonna suck on this all night, Bitch! All fuckin night, fuckin suckin bitch!'

SHERIFF Ain't that lovely? That's just lovely.

MAUREEN I just wrote down what she said he said.

SHERIFF Yeah well just you be quiet and don't say nothing more.

MAUREEN Hell I'm just getting warmed up. Fooey! You're

not fair.

SHERIFF Enormously engorged...! I gotta get out of this work.

MAUREEN Please? Sheriff? The rest of this is legally important.

SHERIFF All right. Just summarize the rest. Gonna puke in a minute anyways.

MAUREEN Ah hah! Now that's just what his partner was doing, apparently. They were both quite drunk.

SHERIFF Do say? Where's he?

MAUREEN It's all in the report.

SHERIFF I can't wait.

MAUREEN Yes. Well. she, in her fright, Mrs Adinolfi...

SHERIFF The former Lucy-Eileen Fannone.

MAUREEN Close enough. She ran right between the drunks and to their car which they had driven out onto the ice.

SHERIFF Also actionable according to ordinance last year.

MAUREEN I got that! I wrote it down. In the charges!

SHERIFF You're up to D minus.

MAUREEN Anyway, she took off in the car, but couldn't get control in her panic. And spun it around a dozen times or so. "In the hypercharged emotional atmosphere, I had difficulty achieving the requisite control."

SHERIFF Silly asshole. Beg pardon again.

MAUREEN Not at all. Anyway, when she finally got the vehicle clear of the lake after missing our furiously dodging and extended hero now moaning in there, she came back and hit him, knocking him cold--on his back fortunately.

SHERIFF Skip the fortunately and unfortunately.

MAUREEN Check. The other hero fled.

SHERIFF I can understand that.

MAUREEN But before he could get off the ice, she almost got him a couple of times too. I alerted Deer River, in which direction he was streaking.

SHERIFF He'll have one frozen ass, he gets that far.

MAUREEN When she finally got here, after being lost for about two hours of literary hysteria...

SHERIFF Figures.

MAUREEN I got Dr Swenson, the young one, to come over and examine her.

SHERIFF You're not likely to ask for the older one.

MAUREEN Of course, she was babbling by then, besides being a pronounced shade of blue. I had already been out to the lake and back and had ole Extendo locked up.

SHERIFF No heater in the car or her too shook to find it?

MAUREEN Both...or neither. The car was full of snow.

SHERIFF Was what?

MAUREEN The two heroes had been drinking most of the day and I guess when they got started it was mild.

SHERIFF Five above or so.

MAUREEN So the other character evidently had all his windows open before the storm hit. By the way I got his name from St. Paul Motor Vehicles, but when he phoned he refused to acknowledge it.

SHERIFF Phoned?

MAUREEN To give a character reference for El Swello in there.

SHERIFF I don't think one from President Truman'd help him, but

I know that that other pervert'll come after that shitbox car after a bit. I deal with him then you can bet your Aunt Fanny!

MAUREEN They had gone to the wrong lake.

SHERIFF We got a few.

MAUREEN Apparently the particular, uh, girl they were seeking-- evidently some import since our local young ladies'd never...

SHERIFF You stop right there cause I heard all the filth I'm gonna from that report or you. This here's gotta be business, Red! Professional business. It ain't no schoolgirl game.

MAUREEN I agree.

SHERIFF You agree! You don't know what you're agreeing to.

MAUREEN I do too!

SHERIFF Criminal Science 1 indeed!

MAUREEN Might I go professionally on?

SHERIFF I already told you no, but that'd be a novelty anyways.

MAUREEN I interpret that as a go-ahead. Well I got there, your intern, to the lake, in my OWN car (seventeen and a half miles at five cents a mile). I right away found him and put my ski cap over it. Well, first I tried to...insert it back in his trousers but I'm not that strong. Anyway the pants are not quite made to handle it that way or something.

SHERIFF My God almighty you shouldn't've. You're not supposed to...!

MAUREEN Emergency. Frostbite danger.

SHERIFF (covering his cars) That's all! That's all!

MAUREEN (louder) Rolled him to the car. Eccentrically. Levered him in after a bit.

SHERIFF You just gotta dirty mind is what you got.

MAUREEN Aw Sheriff, have a heart! Nothing has ever happened to me. Ever! I'm pure. In the most technical sense. At its most narrow. Uh...well there's some room for debate.

SHERIFF Shut up 'cause I ain't listening. Told you about my own daughter, didn't I?

MAUREEN I initially logged, by the way, a call from Mr. Bert Oberman which I duly logged in as complaint about cars and drunks on ice, Big Lake.

SHERIFF That's what you was supposed to tell me first? That's why it's a lousy report, the biggest reason that is.

MAUREEN What would you do if I cried?

SHERIFF Now now.

MAUREEN Forget it. I haven't cried yet and I won't. I throw everything I got into everything I do, and that's all there is to it. And if people don't like it, or don't like me, then...

SHERIFF Oh get off you damn high horse. I'd rather see you cry than that. Anyways, never mind any more of this, (shouts) You best wake up, young man, if there's your side of this anywheres.

MAUREEN He did wake up the once to beg me not to tell his mother or commanding officer.

SHERIFF He's in the service?

MAUREEN On his way to officer's school.

SHERIFF Figures.

MAUREEN His plane was grounded.

SHERIFF (leaping up and striding) Goddamn little bitty town with once in a blue moon domestic disturbance or six or seven kids pissing into a lake and now it's every day a circus of crime! I gotta get me early retirement. Nerves can't take it no more. And Doc Swenson, the old one'll sign it. -(He stares at the grain elevators on the calendar.)

MAUREEN ...was grounded in Minneapolis and then he started

hitchhiking. A meat truck brought him here.

SHERIFF Must be Canadian army he was interested in, getting this far north.

MAUREEN I speculated that at a point he mistook north for south, while encountering quite a few watering places before he hooked up with the other hero at Frozen Assets up on Middle Lake. And that's where they hatched their scheme, the other hero apparently knowing a real pro in our general vicinity.

SHERIFF Goddamn disgusting shit takes the cake.

MAUREEN I hope not.

SHERIFF You can go home now.

MAUREEN What'll I do about my hat?

SHERIFF (weariest) I'll go see.

SKIPPER (off) No! Please!

MAUREEN. Goodness! It must be completely frozen in the up position, like a stuck drawbridge or something.

SHERIFF Keep going on with this flip stuff and you'll see! Attitudes got a lot to do with things.

MAUREEN Tell him. But I'll stop. You got to admit, though, it's an unusual case.

SHERIFF It's just indecent exposure, take away the comedy. Ice Follies!

MAUREEN It's just stupidity.

SHERIFF That too.

MAUREEN I think he's crying.

SHERIFF They always cry afterwards.

MAUREEN He asked fifty times if I could give him a break. I told him that *I* couldn't but...

SHERIFF Uh uh, sister! That silly woman gives to both parties in this town, and in the state too. She'd be state committeewoman for one or the other if she could do something without falling down.

Anyways, I give him a break and she burns up the wires to St. Paul, and I end up getting the mayor, permanent, on my neck. He can only handle one idea at a time and that'd be me. No thanks!

So I can't see no other way but that he got to go in front of the justice and hear this complaint read. No two ways about it. After all, the woman saw what she saw and heard what she heard.

MAUREEN Sheriff!

SHERIFF Yeah, Sheriff! It's what I know how to be even with every goddamn thing getting more awful every goddamn day!

MAUREEN Now come on! Three quarters of the people in this township have done worse things.

SHERIFF I'd say half. And they wasn't caught at it. So come on now, my ass! What you care about it anyways?

MAUREEN Maybe I want to take it home.

SHERIFF I warned you earlier about those damn jokes of yours. Jesus Mary and Joseph, the ladies are worse than the men nowadays. I swear to God they is! Do they all the time make dirty jokes at that damn college now? Is that what they do?

MAUREEN She's back at the lake by now. Young Doc Swenson was gonna drop her off. Why not give her a call? If he answers hang up.

SHERIFF Now why would I wanna do...? For what reason? You answer me that.

MAUREEN You're a veteran. Let's get him to Korea faster.

SHERIFF Keep talking. I ain't listening but keep talking.

MAUREEN She is a somewhat worldly woman and that in there is the

All American boy! Boy of the month back in Connecticut. Lions Club. He showed me his trophy. Picture of it.

SKIPPER (sobs) I was. Boy of the month!

SHERIFF Good! You're good at showing things. You can show it to the judge.

SKIPPER (sobs)

MAUREEN Sheriff! Why be so mean?

SHERIFF You just shut up. (two beats) And you in there better shut up and...(whispers) shut up your cars too.

MAUREEN He's not hearing a thing.

SKIPPER I'm not hearing a thing.

SHERIFF Comes to his senses instantly. Some don't learn so fast.

MAUREEN Touché.

SHERIFF All right. I'll try calling the crazy witch. God knows I don't want nothing to do with a case like this if I can help it. I'm off to the mayor's office. He's ice-fishing so what he don't know won't hurt him. At any rate I don't want you two hearing what I say.

MAUREEN My mouth would be zipped! Zipped! It'd never pass my lips.

SHERIFF You can't help yourself. (exiting) If he moves shoot him.

Enormously engorged! Jesus H. Christ on a bicycle! (exits)

SKIPPER Oh my God! Oh my God! This isn't happening. I don't remember any of it. Nothing! Except cold. Awful awful cold! I...just could've. I...

MAUREEN We have an eyewitness. Not the most reliable but reliable enough.

SKIPPER Do you really have a gun?

MAUREEN I can shoot one. You don't get soft girls up here or or sucking whores, either. You bastards with your low bastards' opinions of women! Boy oh boy, we're gonna put the screws down on you till you howl. Howl! And I'll love every minute of it.

And I could shoot you. Boy could I! And give me back my hat. Empirical evidence seems to indicate that it's no longer needed.

SKIPPER Yes. Uh. Yes. Excuse me. Thank you. (tosses in long floppy knitted cap, red, with huge, bulbous, multicolored tassel.)

MAUREEN Oh God now I'm turning scarlet. I can feel it. The perverted rottenness of this breaks through the asinine comedy or something. Gets me deep. The human comedy. It turns us all into assholes finally. Makes us all expose ourselves.

SKIPPER What I did wasn't so...

MAUREEN Oh yes it was! And don't get encouraged. I'm using exposed figuratively. It's just a whatchacallit. Metaphor.

SKIPPER You're nice. Really you are.

MAUREEN 'Course you operated in strictly the literal range. (giddy laughing)

SKIPPER I never know if you're ever on my side. Not really.

MAUREEN Don't count on me cause I don't count. Besides I'm a police officer. You'd better count on Mrs Adinolfi being reasonable. I know she will--for a small price.

SKIPPER Whaaaa?

MAUREEN For me to know and you to find out. Like just about everything, if I can judge from our acquaintance so far. Boy oh boy this little job has been an education.

SKIPPER I'll bet, but what did you mean about Mrs...?

MAUREEN You're the first dickie waver though. Damn but you're making me nervous again! I'm starting to get really nervous just being here with you. This is serious shit you're into. Yuk! It's...awful damn sick stuff, don't you think?

SKIPPER Please. Don't. I'm not anything like...drunk!
I got drunk, and went nuts or something. Or showing off before
the other guy. He said that if I was afraid, then I was a queer!
Holy Jesus what happened to me? Maybe I got a brain tumor!

MAUREEN Calm down now and don't worry. You just relax as much as
you can.

SKIPPER Thanks...for everything.

MAUREEN You're just a pervert is all.

SKIPPER Do you always have the back of that hand ready? You
Irish or something? It's meanness.

MAUREEN They don't jail you for that.

SKIPPER Maybe they should.

MAUREEN You'll like our more permanent accommodations. Decent
and clean but with lots of reminders of what a shit you are. I
went through with my penology class. Not to make another joke.

SKIPPER God oh please God I'll do anything if only...

MAUREEN But hell, if you have to be incarcerated you can see the
priest.

SKIPPER How...?

MAUREEN When you showed me your boy of the month picture I saw
your Army ID and it said R. C. You know, more I think about it,
when I'm not disgusted or laughing, what...what you did
was...Catholic.

SKIPPER Are you crazy?

MAUREEN No! I think there was something Catholic in what you
did, that's all. Repression. Rules. Answers. It all makes sense.
And all the guilt that comes with the whole freakin package. And
your mother.

SKIPPER My mother?

MAUREEN Like to meet her. One look. Icing ladyfingers for the priests in the rectory, typical Catholic sneak. And your father, Milquetoast driving the nuns in the station wagon, stopping so they can pee at Howard Johnsons.

SKIPPER Look! I appreciate what you've done trying to get the sheriff to call that lady, and your hat, but ... I just got drunk. There's no Cath-

MAUREEN-. Nah. Uh uh. Devils fighting deep in there. Had to bust out. The terror of secrets secrets secrets! Bless me Father for I have imagined gorgeous sin, infinite perversions of of of of penises and breasts and undulating asses stretching to eternity! Oh it was Catholic all right.

SKIPPER Give me the gun.

MAZREEN And I heard some shit that nuns won't let little girls wear patent leather shoes cause their panties'd reflect.

SKIPPER I don't know. I don't know anything about that or or or anything else. I don't know anything. I'm a zero, a zero!

AUREEN Now don't let the word panties throw you. It's just underwear-unless you're a collector. Then you can cut up the ones you're tired of--say the peach colored, and make bookmarks for your missal.

SKIPPER Oh come on!

MAUREEN Secrets. Catholic secrets. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Scene 2

On the outside of the window, where snow adds to the pile on the sill in whipping strings, where the frosty-gold panes shudder from time to time. We see only their shadowy forms inside.

SKIPPER He sure doesn't like me.

MAUREEN Who cares? He had to take all those accident reports home to straighten out. He's forgotten you. Actually he's kind of sweet. Phoned my mother to get her okay. She trusts my judgement. You do that early up here.

SKIPPER That a blizzard out there or what?

MAUREEN Pretty isn't it?

SKIPPER That come out of you, who suggested a letter to my commanding officer.

MAUREEN What finally sprung you. And he'll never write it. God look at you! You need your mommy along. No boots. Little light coat. oh well, you won't freeze completely by the time I get you to Mrs Adinolfi's for your apology. And she won't press...charges that is.

SKIPPER Thank God, I, I'm sorry for everything and can't wait to take my face away.

MAUREEN Don't mention it. Nothing happens here in winter. It made my life. Or summer.

SKIPPER But how will I get back from the lake?

MAUREEN Don't you ever look at anybody? You would see red! hair and vibrant green eyes...complexion of almond rose! The last alone surpassing your sin!

SKIPPER Pardon?

MAUREEN Dr Marius Ohgood begged me to sign up for another

semester of The Physics of Lechery just so he could see my hair. Great man in the field. Magnetic. And lightning fast hands!

SKIPPER What I said was...

And now snow feathers down onto the pile on the sill, sticks to the panes in champagne-colored crystals.

MAUREEN And what I said was "car full of snow oh Jesus!"

SKIPPER Here we go again.

MAUREEN It's true, haven't laughed my full. Sheriff put a lid on me and then I had to guard a dangerous prisoner. All in a professional manner. Like a minister or a doctor or a lawyer or a whore! Professional! It's all as ridiculous as you are. You have to give me a full ten minutes. There's too much to laugh at. I'll never laugh again at you--maybe never again anyway, living here.

SKIPPER Please? Can't we go?

MAUREEN The red hair's my ticket out! I don't play football.

SKIPPER Football?

MAUREEN She's dabbing on Evening In Paris right now.

SKIPPER Don't you ever stop?

MAUREEN Boy of the month you know shit! What month. March, since you're a soldier, thus Mars? Or is there a month for Priapus?

SKIPPER It's...immoral. She's...over fifty.

MAUREEN Jesus Christ the wonderful drunken Catholic riding around with another complete bum in a car full of snow and with hot plans for oral rape! And now it's morality! Last refuge of the true pervert. Or maybe patriot, too, in your case.

SKIPPER How would you like me to make fun of you all the time?

MAUREEN I got three brothers and they're all pulling on it from morning till night.

SKIPPER How interesting. Ever hear of a one-joke play?

MAUREEN I live one with these damn Swedes around here. In their own joke a Swede is entertainment director in Hell. Gives an idea of the general gaiety hereabouts.

SKIPPER I'm walking out of here now, with or without... Oooooo!

MAUREEN What?

SKIPPER Just started shaking!

MAUREEN Someone walking on your grave.

SKIPPER I...just can't take any more!

MAUREEN Oh pretty my mouth and pretty my eyes and pretty oh pretty my hair and my eyes and pretty oh pretty my mouth and my hair.

All wind ceases and the pile of snow on the sill seems to be glowing from within. The golden panes bloom.

MAUREEN I'm Catholic too, Skipper.